



# LEARNING SKILLS, PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

## SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN THE PHILIPPINES REPORT



**SITUATION**  
OF  
**CHILDREN**  
IN THE PHILIPPINES



---

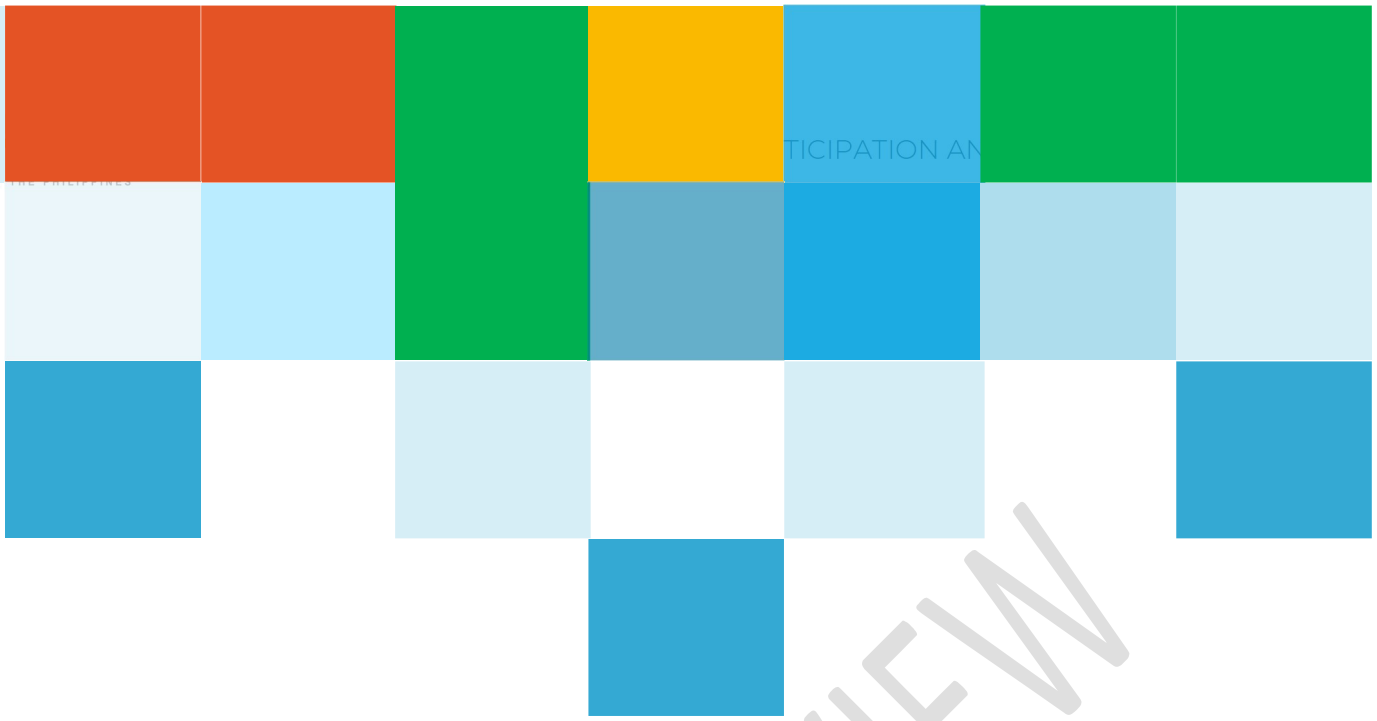
Publication Date

2023

Reports available at [situationofchildren.org/latest-evidence](https://situationofchildren.org/latest-evidence)

---

**Situation of Children Reports** provide in-depth analyses of child rights issues in the Philippines to help facilitate informed decision-making in child welfare and rights, covering areas like health, education, and protection. To view interactive dashboards and access the latest data, please visit [www.situationofchildren.org](https://www.situationofchildren.org)



This subdimension draws attention to learning outcomes and skills development of children as well as their engagement and meaningful participation in processes where they form and express their views about their rights and matters that affect them and the community in which they live, directly or indirectly.

Measuring student proficiencies is vital in determining and analyzing learning outcomes and skills development of and for children. The 2019 SEA-PLM assessment framework looks at children's proficiencies in essential learning domains to monitor learning outcomes, help understand factors that facilitate or hinder learning, and inform proportionate changes in policies, programs, and services in the education system.

# SEA-PLM highlights the importance of reading, writing, and mathematical literacy in Grade V pupils, emphasizing the need for effective engagement and participation of students in education governance.

SEA-PLM focuses on reading, writing, and mathematics literacy among Grade V pupils, which represent the lower end of primary education.

Reading literacy is defined as “understanding, using and responding to a range of written texts, in order to meet personal, societal, economic and civic needs.”

Mathematical proficiency refers to “a person’s capacity, given a problem in a context that is of interest or importance to them to translate the problem into a suitable mathematical formulation, to apply mathematical knowledge and skills to find a solution, and to interpret the mathematical results in relation to the context and to review the merits or limitations of those results.”

Lastly, writing literacy refers to “constructing meaning by generating a range of written texts to express oneself and communicate with others, to meet personal, societal, and civic needs”.

The 2019 SEA-PLM found the Philippines as having the second highest proportion of Grade V children with the lowest proficiency for reading and mathematical literacy among six ASEAN countries (including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Viet Nam).

Conversely, the country has the second lowest proportion of children achieving the highest proficiency levels in both domains.

With growing attention and focus on children’s rights, there is increasing recognition of, in particular, children’s right to participation and children’s abilities to express their views and speak for themselves and their community. However, opportunities and situations for children’s engagement and participation vary in different degrees across spatial, socio-economic, and other spectrums giving rise to gaps, inequities, and challenges. It is therefore incumbent of caregivers and institutional stakeholders to find ways to facilitate worthwhile engagement and meaningful participation by children in community and society.

The school community is an ideal environment for children’s engagement and participation. The Supreme Pupil Government (SPG) and the Supreme Student Government (SSG), for elementary and high school levels, respectively, are among mechanisms integrated in the basic education system that promote and facilitate students’ engagement and participation. Through the SPG and SSG, students are able to voice out and share their views on concerns that affect their lives as students as well as contribute to improving education governance. Additionally, the

majority of school governing councils reserve a seat for a student representative as mandated by DepEd Order No. 47, S. 2014 and a child

protection committee is established in every school.

## Child Rights Situation Analysis

Key indicators with regard to learning, skills, participation and engagement featured here are the mean scores and proportion of children achieving minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics at the end of primary and secondary levels.

Three out of every ten Grade V pupils (or 27 per cent) in the Philippines are found to have the lowest proficiency level for reading literacy, second highest among six ASEAN countries (2019 SEA-PLM).

Conversely, only one out of ten children (or 10 per cent) are able to achieve the highest proficiency levels (aligned with the SDG indicator on 'at least minimum proficiency at end of primary'), second fewest among the same countries.

Two in every ten Grade V children (18 per cent) have the lowest proficiency in mathematics, slightly better than in reading but again the second worst performing of the six countries (2019 SEA-PLM).

On the opposite end of the measure, 35 per cent of the children (or 3-4 of every ten) have achieved the SDG indicator of at least minimum proficiency at end of primary level.

Minimum proficiency for reading among secondary students has improved slightly from 20 per cent in 2018 to 23.7 per cent in 2022 (2018 and 2022 PISA). However, the country's mean score in reading literacy of 347 in 2022 is higher than the 340 achieved in 2018 but remains significantly below the average score

among participating OECD and ASEAN countries at 487 and 408, respectively. The Philippines was one of six participating ASEAN countries that also include Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand).

The proportion of Filipino high school students achieving minimum proficiency in mathematics Filipinos has dropped to 16 per cent in 2022 from 19.7 per cent in 2018 (2018 and 2022 PISA).

The Philippines turned in the lowest mean score in mathematics proficiency among the six participating ASEAN countries. The mean score for mathematics literacy barely improved, from 353 in 2018 to 355 in 2022. This is significantly lower than the average score of 472 for OECD countries and 424 for the six ASEAN countries, even with significant drop in proficiency scores in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, and OECD.

Girls have higher mean scores and proportion on reading and mathematical proficiency than boys, but still way below the OECD average (2018 and 2022 PISA). Senior high students' mean score in reading literacy is significantly higher than that of junior high students but it is the reverse in mathematics literacy.

# Equity & Risk

## EQUITY

Gender	<p><b>Filipino girls performed better on both reading and mathematical proficiency than boys. This may indicate higher educational attainment rate among girls than boys.</b> However, this does not translate into proportional employment rates for girls, suggesting that other barriers—like domestic labour, childcare and gendered social norms—create inequities for girls and women with regard to employability in later life.</p>
Disability	<p>This situation analysis has not been able to determine any data which disaggregates by disability under this subdimension.</p>
Subnational	<p><b>At the primary level, MIMAROPA and Region V have the 2 lowest proportions of Grade V pupils reaching the minimum proficiency level in reading literacy, at 1.8 per cent and 2.8 per cent, respectively (2019 SEA-PLM).</b></p> <p>Assessment results are so skewed that 13 of the 16 covered regions (except BARMM) registered below the national average of 10 per cent. In mathematics, the lowest proportions achieving minimum proficiency can be found in MIMAROPA with 4.7 per cent, Region XII with 6.4 per cent, and Region IX and Caraga Region with 7 per cent apiece.</p> <p>Eleven of 16 regions included in the assessment have proportions below the national average of 17 per cent while NCR has the highest rate at 34.4 per cent. The regions with the lowest rates are also those with poverty incidence among children above the national average.</p> <p><b>At the secondary level, Caraga Region, Region XI, and Region IX had the lowest proportions of high school students achieving the minimum reading proficiency with 4.8 per cent, 4.9 per cent, and 7.1 per cent, respectively.</b></p> <p>Only five of the 16 participating regions had rates above the national average of 20 per cent. For mathematics, the least performing regions were Region XII and Caraga Region each with 5.3 per cent, which is way below the national average of 19.7 per cent.</p>

## RISKS

Natural hazards	<p><b>Climate change and changing weather patterns pose a significant risk to education.</b></p>
-----------------	--

For example, rising temperatures mean classrooms often become too hot as they are not built to withstand substantial heat with few electric fans, limited WASH facilities and some even lacking roofs and effective shading.

This risk is so severe that there are reportedly discussions under way about the possibility of moving the school calendar to run from June to March (which was the schedule prior to the pandemic), so that the hottest months are avoided.

**Schools and other educational institutions are also at risk of stronger typhoons, which many are not built to withstand.** While digital systems are being introduced and developed to counter the impacts of resulting learning loss, these are not so effective as in-person learning.

Conflict

**Children affected by conflict of all ages are at risk of disruption to education services and access.** To seek to mitigate this risk, the DepEd Learner Rights and Protection Office has created a protocol for Children in Situations of Armed Conflict.

Health  
Crisis/Pandemic

- **The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant loss of learning and learning opportunities in the Philippines, in which some of the world's most stringent COVID-19 containment measures were implemented preventing many from attending school or engaging in learning for up to a year.** As such, any such future health crisis would pose a significant risk to learning outcomes and opportunities.

- **Malnutrition risks can be higher among those not attending schools, if they are unable to benefit from school feeding programmes.**

In turn, malnutrition and hunger can risk the extent to which children are able to learn effectively, as hunger affects children's ability to concentrate and malnutrition affects their cognitive development.

- **Teachers face mental health challenges due to workloads; this was noted to be a particular challenge during COVID-19.** This indicates the risk future pandemics could pose to teachers' mental health, and potentially their service provision. DepEd is seeking to support teachers experiencing depression and other mental health challenges.

Other risks

- **Changes to personnel and leadership within the DepEd affect the delivery of education services in the Philippines.**

Each new senior official or representative appointed or elected may introduce new structures and priorities, which can make it challenging for INGOs and other partners to work effectively as they need to rebuild connections, networks and relationships, particularly for advocacy work.

That said, this risk is less severe at the local level, as personnel changes within local government generally have less of an impact on educational priorities.

- **Children increasingly have access to mobile phones, which can affect their ability to concentrate in classes as well as their health** (for example, risking the risk of eyesight problems which can in turn impact reading proficiency).

## Legislation & Policy Analysis

The 1987 Philippine Constitution lays down the foundation of the current Philippine education system and protects and promotes the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels. Below presents some key milestones in the development of the educational system.

- Republic Act No. 9155 or the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 to further strengthen the governance of basic education.
- Republic Act No. 10157 making Kindergarten mandatory for all 5-year-old children.
- Republic Act No. 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 further restructuring the sector by transforming basic education into 13 years of compulsory schooling.
- Republic Act No. 10655 to broaden access to relevant quality education.
- Republic Act No. 10361 providing opportunity for domestic workers to finish basic education through the ALS.
- Republic Act No. 8371 mandating the State to provide equal access to cultural opportunities to indigenous peoples through the education system.
- Republic Act No. 9442 mandating the State to provide educational assistance to persons with disabilities.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the DepEd developed the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan, which streamlined the curriculum into essential learning competencies for SY 2020-2021 to maintain a level of educational attainment and opportunity.

## Bottleneck Analysis

Demand

- **Boys are often encouraged to augment family income at the expense of school attendance. In the transition between JHS and SHS, higher rates of boys are lost than girls.** This is reportedly because many boys - particularly from poorer households - are encouraged to find work to augment their family income instead.

- **Non-attendance in ECE and perceptions that older siblings should provide for their younger siblings can affect their access to education.** Where younger siblings are not enrolled in ECE, this is a bottleneck for old siblings' access to education, as older siblings - particularly girls - are often tasked with taking care of younger children. In general, there is also a prevalent perception that the role of older children is to provide for the family, so they usually do not complete education but support younger siblings instead. This demonstrates the interconnectivity of access to education across age groups.
- **High school dropout rates among boys are also due to 'lack of interest'. This is the reason most often cited for boys dropping out of school.** However, this situation analysis could determine little evidence as to why this may be the case, and why lack of interest is cited by boys so much more frequently than girls. This potential lack of understanding around why this key reason for boys' school dropout is cited is a potential bottleneck to resolving the challenge.
- **Poverty is a key reason for many children not being able to pursue an education.** Either they cannot afford school fees - particularly at higher education levels - or children are required to engage in income-generating activities to support their households. Some schools are beginning to teach livelihood skills, but not all can afford, or have the technical capacities, to do so and the DepEd does not have sufficient resources to support this work yet. Additionally, in the transition to high school many children must begin paying for transportation which is beyond the material means of some, contributing to drop out rates in the transition from elementary to high school (there is roughly one elementary school per barangay, and one high school per municipality).
- **Children with disabilities are often 'hidden'.** Some families of children with disabilities choose to keep those children at home, as there is reportedly sometimes shame attached to disabilities. This is a bottleneck to their access to education.
- **Absentee parents impact children's learning.** Where parents are often not at home - either due to work at home or abroad, or for any other reason - this is a bottleneck to children's access to education as well as their educational attainment as they are often less supported to learn, or to continue their learning at home.

Supply

- **The Philippines is a supplier of teachers globally, which means there are fewer Filipino teachers to teach Filipino children.** Quality teachers are often tempted to work abroad - particularly in countries like the USA - where salaries are higher. This results in fewer quality teachers remaining in the Philippines.
- **Pupils who do not speak English or Tagalog face educational barriers.** This is a bottleneck particularly affecting indigenous peoples who may not speak



these two languages, which are the typical languages of instruction in Filipino schools.

Enabling environment

- **High rates of bullying impact children’s learning, skills, participation and engagement.** The Philippines has particularly high rates of bullying. This limits the extent to which the children affected can participate and engage, given the psychological impact of bullying and the extent to which it can create barriers to social engagement.
- **Nationwide, there is a shortage of teachers and budget shortages at the national level create challenges in efforts to resolve this issue.** Low student to teacher ratios are recorded across the Philippines, which can affect educational quality as teachers are able to spend less time responding to the individual needs of their pupils.

DepEd is reportedly working hard to try to address this gap, but reportedly has insufficient budget to fund the salaries and pensions or enough teachers. The problem is particularly acute with regards to special educational needs teachers.

- **Creating an inclusive environment.** The PISA results indicate that in the Philippines “for every unit in the index of sense of belonging at school was associated with an increase of more than 20 score points in reading, compared to the OECD average of 4 score points.”

DRAFT FOR

# References

1. World Bank Group, UNICEF and partners. (2022). The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update.
2. World Bank Group (2019). Unlocking the Potential of the Bangsamoro People through the Alternative Learning System (Overview).
3. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. (1987). 1987 Philippine Constitution.
4. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. (2001). Republic Act No. 9155 or the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001.
5. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. (2012). Republic Act No. 10157 or the Kindergarten Education Act of 2012.
6. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. (2013). Republic Act No. 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013.
7. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. (2014). Republic Act No. 10655 or the Act Repealing the Crime of Premature Marriage of 2014.
8. Department of Labor and Employment. (2012). Republic Act No. 10361 or an Act Instituting Policies for the Protection and Welfare of Domestic Workers.
9. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. (1997). Republic Act No. 8371 or an Act to Recognize, Protect and Promote the Rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples.
10. National Council on Disability Affairs. (2006). Republic Act No. 9442 or an Act Amending Republic Act No. 7277, Otherwise Known As The "Magna Carta For Disabled Persons".
11. UNICEF and SEA-PLM. (2019). SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report Summary: Children's learning in 6 Southeast Asian countries.
12. Department for Education. (2018). PISA 2018: National Report of the Philippines.
13. DepEd. (2014). DO 47, S. 2014 - Constitution and By-Laws of the Supreme Pupil Government and Supreme Student Government in Elementary and Secondary Schools.
14. The World Bank. (2021), Overcoming Barriers to Women's Economic Empowerment in the Philippines.
15. DepEd. (2021). DepEd launches mental health helpline system for learners, teachers.

---

The information presented in this report reflects the analyses and findings of the researchers and does not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC), the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), or their collaborating organizations. Although efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data, this report primarily utilizes publicly available information, which may not fully encapsulate all aspects of children's situations in the Philippines.

The collaborating organizations do not assure the completeness or accuracy of the data included in these reports and accept no responsibility for any consequences stemming from their usage. The inclusion or mention of specific entities, research findings, or approaches in the reports does not constitute endorsement or preference by the collaborating organizations. Furthermore, references to specific geographic or administrative regions, or the use of the term "country," are intended solely for analytical purposes and do not indicate any position on the legal status, governance, or territorial integrity of such regions.

---